

Coins

Pompeii coins surface

By Roger Boye

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS before Pompeii was buried under several feet of volcanic rubble, the tyrant Nero became ruler of the Roman Empire.

Produce coins honoring the boss, the government ordered workers at the Rome mint in A.D. 54. Nero, a man described by historians as a vain buffoon, wanted his portrait stamped into coins made during his reign, a common practice of Roman emperors.

One coin showing Nero's head, a gold aureus minted in A.D. 57, is part

of an impressive display of 26 ancient Greek and Roman coins at the Art Institute. Although the coins are not part of the current Pompeii exhibit, many are reminders of fascinating bits of Pompeii history.

The 26 coins — 10 gold and 16 silver — are part of a little-known and rarely displayed institute collection of more than 200 ancient coins acquired in the 1920s. The institute is in the process of cataloging the collection and hopes eventually to set up other exhibits, said Patrice Marandel, curator of earlier paintings, sculpture, and classical art.